

A.E. Ward's 1906 mention of birds collected "from Baltistan found in the summer." (*JBNHS* 17(2): 482). However, no dates are associated with this claim, and as migration through this area occurs at the very end of August into early September it is not clear if the birds collected were breeding or migrating.

A female rock thrush was observed by us on 8th and 9th August 1995, near Hopar in the Nagar Valley of Hunza, (36° 23' N Lat. 74° 43' E long.) for a total of three hours over two days. The bird was seen at an elevation of 3,400 m on an open grassy slope near a steep boulder-strewn hill. The bird showed strong site fidelity, returning when approached too closely and regularly chasing off black redstarts (*Phoenicurus ochruros*) that approached the rock

walls of a corral.

While there was no definite proof of nesting, the female was an adult and exhibited strong site fidelity and territorial behaviour toward other birds. Our observations were made after the known breeding season but prior to the occurrence of passage migration through this region (late August and September). We submit that this is further evidence that the rock thrush *Monticola saxatilis* is at least an occasional breeder in the mountains of north Kashmir.

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16. RECORD OF SIBERIAN BLUE CHAT (*ERYTHACUS CYANE*) FROM PAURI GARHWAL, UTTAR PRADESH, IN THE WESTERN HIMALAYAS

On 29 May 1996 we were watching birds from the premises of a temple (altitude *c.* 1940 m) situated *c.* 120 metres above the town of Pauri (30° 0' N & 78° 47' E) in Pauri Garhwal dist. of Uttar Pradesh. The forest around consisted of tall, old specimens of fir (*Abies* spp.), oak (*Quercus* spp.), chir pine (*Pinus roxburghii*), spruce (*Picea* spp.), rhododendron (*Rhododendron* spp.) and deodar (*Cedrus deodara*). Around 0800 hrs, while observing a group of small flycatchers and white-eyes, I suddenly saw a bird flying in and settling on a branch of a chir pine tree. The bird sat about 10 metres in front of me at eye level. The morning being bright and sunny, I got a very clear look at the bird. The sparrow-sized bird had beautiful blackish blue and white plumage. I identified it as the Siberian blue chat (*Erythacus cyane*). I was familiar with the appearance of this bird from Ali and Ripley's *Pictorial Guide* Plate 81. While trying to identify an orange-flanked bush robin (*Erythacus cyanurus*) a few days earlier, initially

I could only view its dark blue dorsal parts, a lighter supercilium, white underparts and the dark band from near the bill that extends over the eyes to the sides of the breast. I could not see its orange flanks and the faint greyish tinge on the lower breast. It looked very like the Siberian blue chat illustrated in Plate 81, but differed from it in having the supercilium. Later, when the bird moved, I saw the flank and breast and identified it as *Erythacus cyanurus*.

The bird I saw from the Pauri temple premises perfectly matched the illustration of the Siberian blue chat. Through my 8x30 binoculars I could clearly make out the lack of any trace of supercilium, rufous-orange patch on the sides and the faint greyish lower breast. I noticed the broad black band extending over the eye from the bill to the sides of the breast up to shoulder level. In *E. cyanurus* the band is blue. The slaty blue upperparts from forehead, crown to rump were concolorous, but the upper tail coverts were a little deeper in shade and slightly more glossy

than the rest. I also saw that the entire underparts, from chin to under tail coverts and vent, were spotless white. The legs were light pinkish in colour. I had the *Pictorial Guide* in my hand while observing this bird. Since the bird is extremely rare in India, I checked the identifying features many times over till I was sure about its identity.

Ali & Ripley (1983a) give the distribution in India as - "A straggler in winter and during migration. Haldibari duars, Bengal 18 February 1932 (Inglis coll., Brit. Mus.); Manipur, a party in April (Hume)". In the footnote about *Erythacus cyane* it gives the following information - "A specimen in the Pinwill coll. (Brit. Mus.) is labelled Simla but 'Simla' is written in such a way that it evidently was not written at the time though it is Pinwill's writing"

(Whistler's MS). An observation by Magrath in Hazara in June (*JBNHS* 18: 197) certainly pertains to *Muscicapa leucomelanura*, as does one from Narkanda, c. 35 km NE. of Simla (von Pelzeln, *Ibis* 1868: 310). Ali and Ripley (1983b) give the distribution as "Isolated records from Bengal duars, Manipur and S. Andamans".

My record from Pauri may point out that *Erythacus cyane* may be a straggler to Western Himalayas and there is a likelihood that the specimen from the Pinwill collection was correctly labelled.

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17. STATUS OF THE GHARIAL *GAVIALIS GANGETICUS* IN THE MAIN BRAHMAPUTRA RIVER

(With one text-figure)

In the Brahmaputra river, the gharial *Gavialis gangeticus* was once fairly common (Cooper 1873), but now it is rarely seen and its future is bleak. In some recent works (Singh 1991; Whitaker and Basu 1992), its status in the Brahmaputra river was not dealt with in detail and its current status is unclear. Moreover, information provided by Singh (1991) referring to Singh, Kar and Choudhury (1984) does not seem to be based on actual field study. The only recent information on the species from a part of the river is from Choudhury (1992). Cooper (1951 a, b) covered the Barak river system, erroneously referred to by Singh (1991) and Singh, Kar and Choudhury (1984).

During the past decade, I carried out field work in different parts of the Brahmaputra river as part of a broader survey on wildlife. The data collected on the occurrence of the gharial are presented below.

c. 1979: One seen near Tekeliphuta, near Lakhimpur-Jorhat inter-district boundary, in the afternoon hours. It was about 2.5 - 3.0 metres long.

1981-83: A large gharial seen near Rangdoi, now part of Dibru-Saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary, Tinsukia district; it was 4.5 - 5.0 m long.

1982: One seen near Baluchar, now part of Dibru-Saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary, Tinsukia district.